

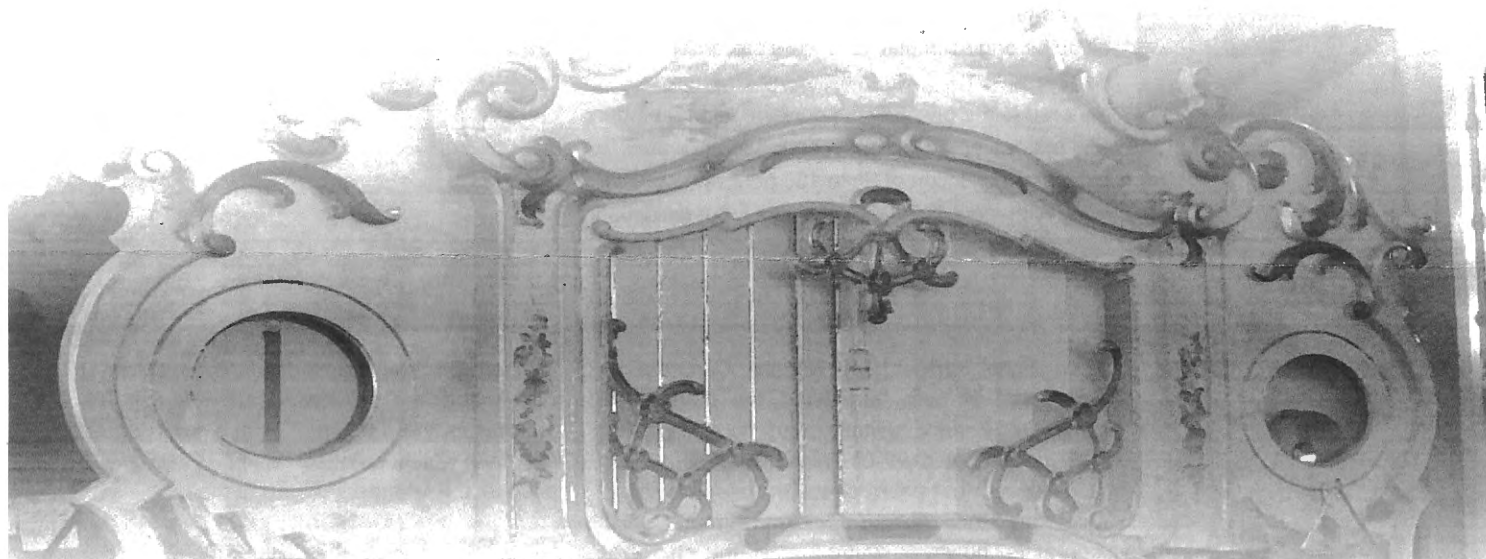
# Glen Echo Park

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Glen Echo Park  
Administered by the George  
Washington Memorial Parkway



## More Than Just A Carousel



**The Wurlitzer Band Organ** Throughout the summer months Glen Echo Park resounds with the martial music of John Philip Sousa, but you will find neither trumpeters nor drummers parading on the grounds. The sound that accompanies the 1921 Denzel Carousel is created by the park's 1926 Wurlitzer Military Band Organ.

### 86 Years and Counting

The Wurlitzer Style 165 Military Band Organ Unit No. 3779 was ordered by park manager Leonard B. Schloss on April 12, 1926, for the forthcoming summer season. Manufactured in North Tonawanda, New York, the organ was recalibrated to utilize fewer instruments in 1934 and 1941 by the Wurlitzer Company. Following the 1955 sale of the amusement park to Rekab, Inc., the Band Organ deteriorated through poor maintenance and disuse. The Save the Carousel Committee purchased the Band Organ for \$10,000.00 in May 1970.

When Glen Echo Park was acquired by the National Park Service in 1970, the Band Organ

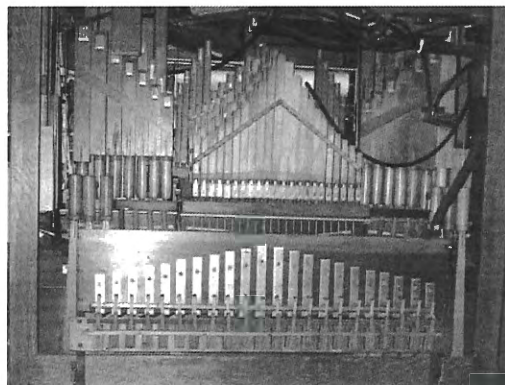
was a high priority restoration project. In 1978, Durward Center restored the Band Organ to its original 1926 mechanical configuration. Rosa Patton (Ragan) restored the Band Organ Façade in 1998 by first removing several layers of old paint, including a solid layer of mint green with pink trim and a layer featuring a parrot and flowers. Having removed the old layers, she was able to bring back the original landscape painting featuring mountains and canoeists. Today, the Band Organ, like the Carousel, is maintained by a dedicated team of employees, volunteers, and specialists.

### How It Works

Without either conductor or band members how does the Band Organ produce such loud music? As with all Wurlitzer Band Organs, the park's Model No. 165 Military Band Organ, uses compressed air, perforated paper music rolls, and a tracker bar containing 75 holes to create the music. Perforations in the music rolls converge with spaces in the tracker bar. When the perforations and tracker bar align, an action is triggered. Valve actions include the sounding of a note, the striking of a percussion instrument, or the activation of a particular pipe rank or glockenspiel bar. Thus, the Band Organ literally plays itself.

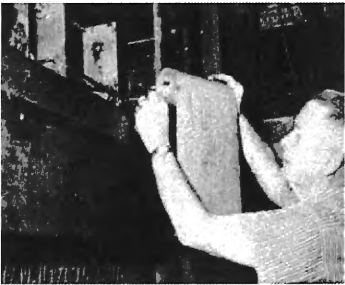
To generate compressed air, the Band Organ relies upon four leather bellows to provide the steady pressure needed to read the music rolls, operate the valves, and control most of instruments. An additional larger set of bellows forms the powerful pressure pump necessary to blow the organ pipes and to beat the big bass drum.

These six bellows provide all of the energy for the Band Organ's 256 'band members'. The roster of instrumentalists—linked to a valve and triggered by the music rolls on the tracker bar—includes 12 bass pipes, 20 accompaniment pipes, 14 viola pipes, 14 saxophone pipes, 6 trombone pipes, 14 trumpet pipes, 88 violin pipes, 22 flageolet pipes, 22 flute pipes, 44 piccolo pipes, a 22-note glockenspiel, a bass drum, a snare drum, a cymbal, a crash cymbal, castanets, and a triangle. That's almost as big as the US Army Band!



Inside the Wurlitzer Band Organ

The Music Rolls



Changing the music rolls, 1959

All of these instruments rely upon our collection of paper music rolls to know what note to play and when to play it. As part of a Wurlitzer upgrade in 1934 and again in 1941, the machine was downgraded from its original scale, which utilized fewer instruments and made the Band Organ easier and cheaper to maintain. As a result of this upgrade, all of the original music rolls were discarded. Beginning in 1978, when the Band Organ was restored to the original configuration, staff members and patrons of the Carousel began to build an extensive collection of Style 165 perforated music rolls. With more than 200 rolls today, our collection consists of over 1,900 musical arrangements.

*"That's one of the reasons the organ [is] really fascinating. There's no computer and [it plays] whatever is on the paper. My first roll was a tribute to Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass."*

--- Max Hurley, Friend of the Glen Echo Park Denzel Carousel since 1978, from the Glen Echo Park Oral History Project

The Brass Ring Game



Enlisted Men Playing Glen Echo's Brass Ring Game

Glen Echo Park's 1921 Dentzel Carousel is comprised of both "standers," the outer-most row of stationary animals, and "jumpers," the two inner-most rows of animals that move up and down. Most riders chose the more exciting ride on the "jumpers." Amusement park operators, however, wanted to fill the standers with happy park patrons, which would in turn excite others into riding the carousel. This machine was their answer.

The brass ring machine is comprised of a platform and a long, hollow arm that dispenses rings. The majority of the rings are steel, but in every batch there is one, and only one, brass ring. The operator of the brass ring machine would stand on this platform and swing the arm out towards the carousel, just within reach of the row of "standers". Riders were encouraged to try their luck and snatch the rings as the carousel rotated ever faster. Some riders were able to sport a steel ring on every finger, but the one who was fortunate enough to grab the brass ring won the ultimate prize, a free ride.

The thrill and excitement of winning a potential ride made the stationary animals just as enticing as the "jumpers." With a free ride on the line, which carousel animals would you choose, the "standers" or the "jumpers?"

Glen Echo Park's brass ring machine was installed in 1921 and remained in use until the close of the amusement park in 1968. The machine was fully restored alongside the carousel in 2002 and today the machine is fully functional.



Glen Echo Park's Dentzel Carousel c. 1921